Accordingly, CCI has undertaken price suppot operation and made purchases to the extent of 7772 bales of kapas from 29.11.99 to 28.1.2000.

Production of Truffle

*317. SHRI ANIL SHARMA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the quantity of truffle (a kind of hilly vegetable) produced in hilly States, including Himachal Pradesh, during the last five years, State-wise;

(b) whether Government have evolved or introduced any technical method of its production; if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) whether the same is being exported; if so, to which countries and what foreign exchange has been earned during the said period, year-wise?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SUNDAR LAL PATWA): (a) Truffle, a subterranean edible mushroom is not being cultivated in India. Some stray reports of its occurrence in forests are there but no organised collection is taking place.

(b) No, Sir. Its production technology has neither been evolved nor introduced in the country so far.

(c) Since no cultivation or organised collection of truffle is being practiced in the country, there is no possibility of its export for the present.

Posting of Envoys

*318. SHRI RAMACHANDRAIAH RUMANDLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the manner in which postings of our envoys are decided;

(b) whether merit is the sole criteria for selection of suitable candidates; and

(c) if so, the reasons for envoys flocking to Delhi for lobbying for their postings and get plum posts?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) The postings of envoys abroad are decided on the basis of a number of considerations which include, *inter alia*, their seniority, career, relevant experience and an overall suitability for the tasks and the post.

(c) Indian envoys from abroad are required to visit the Headquarters of the

Ministry in Delhi for official purposes with the prior approval of the Ministry of External Affairs. In addition, our envoys are also sanctioned leave on personal and emergency grounds to visit India, again with the prior approval of the Ministry. This is as per the existing rules.

Import of Crude Oil

†*319. SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA:
SHRI KAPIL SIBAL:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that enormous increase has taken place in crude oil import in the country during past years;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that 42.90 million tons crude oil was imported during the year 1993-94 whereas this quantity is expected to be 70.00 million tons in the year 1999-2000;

(c) if not, the details in this regard; and

(d) whether Government have identified the reasons behind this increase in the import and areas of its consumption; and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Against a total quantity of 30.82 million metric tonnes (MMT) of crude oil imported during 1993- 94, 57.55 MMT crude oil is estimated to be imported duirng 1999-2000 as per the latest projections.

(d) The factor responsible for recent increase in demand is economical and industrial growth in the country. However, the per capita consumption of fuel in India is still very low *vis-a-vis* Sthe world average consumption.

Scarcity Relief for Gujarat

*320. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government of Gujarat has submitted its proposal for scarcity relief for the year 1999-2000;

(b) if so, what action has been taken and how much amount has been sanctioned;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.